# WRITING LOCAL HISTORY

Alberta
CULTURE AND MULTICULTURALISM

# W R I T I N G  L O C A L  H I S T O R Y

Provincial Archives of Alberta

Publication No. 3

Third Revision

1987

89-04829

# FOREWORD

The celebration of 50 years of provincial autonomy in 1955, participation in the national centennial in 1967, recognition of the Mounted Police centennial in 1974 and the 75th anniversary in 1980 have been powerful stimuli to the compilation of regional and local history in Alberta. Throughout the province, individuals and organized groups have set to work to discover, record and publish the history of these particular communities. Differing in levels of formal education, technical training and achievements in the world, these dedicated people nevertheless have three things in common: They may not be professional historians but they do the work for their own enjoyment and for the enrichment of others' knowledge. In the second place, they often work in isolation and have few guidelines and little practical experience to draw upon locally. Last, but not least, they are moved by a deep compulsion to record the unfolding story of their community.

The aim of this publication is to help amateurs in researching, writing and publishing local history; to impress on them that the local story often reflects a wider (sometimes national) trend and that the nation's history itself is in part the sum total of local history; to describe the 'tools of the trade' and to demonstrate how they may best be used. I hope that this book will give local historians the guidance they need and the encouragement and gratitude they deserve.

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# INTRODUCTION

In essence local history should tell the story of a community. Various approaches can be undertaken. The most valuable route is one that traces the development of your community from its earliest beginnings and which includes all the social, political, economic and religious aspects that influenced the area's growth. This is a comprehensive project that requires a great deal of effort and co-operation, but the work is interesting and the end result rewarding.

A local history is a "do-it-yourself" project. When you undertake the location and research of information you must be prepared to visit archives and libraries and carry out the research yourself, as you know exactly what information it is you want. This approach provides more thorough knowledge than writing to the relevant institutions requesting the staff to do the digging for you. Because of the demands placed on the archivists and librarians by the overall researching public, they usually do not have the time to do much more than indicate what sources of information may be available.

It is important to establish the local history's scope and purpose before embarking on the project. Once this is established, an outline will help you research the subject more efficiently. You won't waste time studying aspects that will not be included in the final publication. However, your outline should be flexible enough to allow the inclusion of any significant information previously unthought of that your research might uncover. You might prefer to limit the book to one aspect of the community's history, such as agriculture or economic development, or social customs or handicrafts. You could chronologically define the information in your book by studying and writing about a particular period. Thus, the history might deal with the activities of the community in the ten years immediately following the first permanent

settlement.

The easiest and probably most popular approach is a compilation of family histories, one in which each member of the community submits a story of his or her family. This kind of book will undoubtedly sell well in your community but will be of little relevance or interest to anyone outside the area. Family histories are only one aspect of your community's story and obtaining them is only a part of the research you should undertake to produce a comprehensive local history. There is nothing wrong with publishing such a book but it cannot be called a true local history; it is only a bock of memoirs. This kind of book also has other disadvantages. It often reveals the limited horizons of local workers and is "inward looking". A planned comprehensive local history is much to be preferred to the family type. However, biographies of families, particularly those who have been in the area from early times, can either be included in a supplement or incorporated into the text in connection with various other events in the community.

If a number of people are involved, your group should consider the possibilities of dividing itself into several committees. Certain people could do research and others could handle the publication and promotion of the book, including the finances. Each task is important to the success of your local history. The group system not only divides the work, it reflects a true community effort. Once the group is together, an approach must be considered and agreed upon. Appoint an editor or a small editorial committee to direct as well as participate in the project. Be prepared to allow up to two to three years for the project.

At this stage, you will have to emphasize the fact that your group will have to edit and verify some of the local material submitted by local contributors. In cross-checking the information you may find conflicts. It is up to you to ensure the history's accuracy. This is vital. Everyone

will have a personal opinion on the choice of material, but the final decision must be made by the editor(s).

The writing of the final text should be done by one person, although it need not be written by a professional historian or writer. This will ensure some consistency of style and presentation of the story, although there is a large amount of work involved.* If one person is not available, you can divide the writing responsibility by asking different people to write certain chapters. Whatever method you choose, write the history so that someone else can read and understand it easily and so that the continuity is preserved. Try to avoid making each chapter a "watertight" compartment.

Oil tanker train at Nisku, [1948] by Harry Pollard. Harry Pollard Collection. Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, image number P. 2858.

* Your style of writing should be your own. If you are concerned about this and feel you need help, it is best to contact the Director, Film and Literary Arts Branch, Cultural Development Division, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, 12th Floor, C.N. Tower, Edmonton.

## A SUGGESTED OUTLINE

It is difficult, if not impossible, to prescribe a basic plan for a local community history because each area has its own distinct individuality. It is, therefore, advisable that a general outline be developed before commencing the actual work. No one community developed completely in isolation, so its history must be related to events and experiences in the neighbouring localities, the immediate geographical area and in the province itself.

The west was mainly settled after the Dominion Lands Act of 1872. This encouraged the development of small, self-sufficient family farm units. As these grew in number, local community centres evolved to provide essential services and activities. You might discover what role, if any, the railway played in the establishment of your community. Not every hamlet or station grew into a large centre. You will need to determine what factors restricted the growth of your town and what encouraged it.

The following is a suggested outline which may prove helpful in the initial stages of planning. Various headings may be combined, divided or deleted at will, depending purely on local circumstances:

1. Geographical background
2. Native people
3. Exploration and early settlement
4. Permanent settlement
5. Government and political development
6. Economic development
7. Social and cultural activities
8. The church in the community
9. Educational development

10. Hospitals and medical services

11. Special times, wars, depression, celebrations

12. Conclusion

## 1. Geographical background

A geographical knowledge of an area is essential to place it in relation to the rest of the province. You should mention the community's location, size and physical characteristics, such as mountains, hills, rivers, lakes and other landmarks with a unique bearing upon the development of the area. Discuss too, natural resources like vegetation, animal life, soil, minerals and climate which influenced settlement to varying degrees.

## 2. Native people

In many communities the native people played a considerable role and if this is true for your area it could be considered as a possible opening. In some instances the Indians have disappeared from areas where new communities now flourish. Why? In other cases they have always formed an essential element of the population. The size and location of the tribes, their means of livelihood, and their customs and crafts should be described. Early relationships between Indians and whites might give you a better understanding of the role they play in the present community. Basic information on the Indians of Alberta will be found in some of the books listed at the end of this publication.

## 3. Exploration and early settlement

Early exploration in what is now Alberta was mainly due to the fur trading companies--the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Through them forts and trading posts were built at different locations. These were really the first establishments, although they cannot be considered first settlements because many inhabitants were not there

for very long. Some company men, however, later became important in local and provincial spheres and in some regions descendants of the first explorers, traders and factors have remained. Why was a fort or trading post established in your community? Was it moved? Why? Records of the fur trade are housed in Winnipeg and Ottawa. By special arrangement with Hudson's Bay Company Archives, the Provincial Archives of Alberta is allowed to borrow microfilm copies of the HBC documents, including posts' journals, account books, incoming and outgoing correspondence, which may be pertinent to localities. Please consult the reference archivist for the rules and procedures concerning use of HBC records. Please allow a few weeks for retrieval, for the microfilm has to be ordered from Winnipeg. A useful guide is:

> Canada. Public Archives of Canada. Manuscript Division. General Inventory, Manuscripts, MG 17-MG 21 [Hudson's Bay Company Archives, MG 20] Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1974.

A copy is available for research at the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

4. Permanent settlement

Permanent settlements appeared and developed at particular locations for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they grew because of physical characteristics that made them trading centres or they may have been on transportation routes. In some instances there was an economic influence, such as coal or timber. Whatever the reason, you will determine when your community commenced to grow. How did it come to be in its particular location? What factors influenced this? How did it receive its name? Who were the original homesteaders or other settlers (e.g. railway agents, etc.)? Try to provide information about these newcomers: their origins, reasons for coming, sources of income, character and ethno-cultural composition and the reaction of the other members of the community to them. Reminiscences of pioneers might provide

information about the establishment and success of early businesses. Who was the first storekeeper?...postmaster? ...teacher?...minister?...doctor? If you can discover when they came and recount some of their activities, you will provide a valuable insight into the time when your community began establishing itself as a centre for the surrounding district. A general description of the community's development from the first permanent settlement to the present could be included here to provide an introduction to the more particular aspects in succeeding chapters.

5. Government and political development

In this part you will have to determine when a local government came into existence. When was the village first erected? Did it later become a town? Who was the first reeve or mayor? The first councillors should be listed by name and some of them might still be alive to narrate the problems they faced in those formative times. You might mention some of the other members of the local government but you should avoid - at this stage at least - a long list of mayors and councillors as this will bore your readers. If you want, a list of this kind can be included as an appendix. What by-laws did the early councillors enact? You should include the story of water, sewage, fire and police protection and the coming of electricity; did your community originally have its own local power station? Or did electricity come much later? This part of your history will include the changes in local government and the improvements in local services. Many of the early records may still be kept in the community.

The local Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta played a vital part and should not be overlooked at this time. Who were they? Did any of them actually live in your community? What were their political affiliations and who did they run against? What were the election issues and how did they affect the community? For example, a community might have

been sharply divided on a particular issue, such as prohibition. The local newspaper files* will have this kind of information and you could get stories from many people who lived through those times. Did the community vote for a particular party? If so, why? Some of the pioneers may have interesting stories about election campaigns, nomination meetings and voting procedures and irregularities. Finally, did any of the local M.L.A.'s achieve cabinet rank? If so, you should mention them and some of their accomplishments.

Similarly the Members of Parliament of Canada for the area should not be forgotten. Although the constituency will be large, the member may have hailed from the community or one nearby. What were some of the federal election issues? Did they divide the community? What were some of the accomplishments of the M.P.'s?

6. Economic development

Most communities in Alberta evolved because of an economic base--that is, they depended upon some economic means for existence, and in much of Alberta this was agriculture. In your research and writing you will have to determine if the area residents are still involved in farming. Have farming and ranching methods changed? To what extent? You should include information about marketing techniques, implements and agricultural organizations. Were organizations such as U.F.A., F.U.A., and Unifarm, dominant forces in the community? Farm women's organizations should not be overlooked.

At the same time, the growth of some communities was initiated by industrial or resource development in the area,

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* If the files of your local newspaper are deficient, you may find a better set is available in paper form or on microfilm in the Legislature Library, or Provincial Archives collections, Edmonton

such as forestry or minerals. Why was the industry established? Did it succeed or fail? Why? If a business or industry was relocated elsewhere, or closed altogether, try to find economic or social reasons to account for this.

A community might have grown as the result of farming or of industry but it was also itself the centre of goods and services; these were vital factors. You might find out who was the first storekeeper, postmaster, blacksmith and study their activities and business methods. There may have been an Oriental laundry or restaurant (or both) which played and integral part in the development of the community. In a pioneer community where animals supplied much of the power, they needed care. How was this accomplished? Who was the first veterinarian? And don't forget the first undertaker; there usually are some colourful stories about undertakers. The first hotel and its bar should not be overlooked, not to mention the clientele! Which bank was first established in the community? Who was its first manager? How large was the trading area? If there was a Board of Trade or Chamber of Commerce, include an account of this organization, determining if possible its influence on the area.

Transportation and communications were major factors in the growth of the community and the success of its inhabitants. What methods and routes were used to get to, out of, or around the area? Was water transportation ever a factor? When did the railway first come? When did roads replace trails? Who had the first automobile? How did all these factors affect the growth of the community? You should also include in this chapter information about the telegraph, postal and telephone services. When did the first telephones appear? Was there a local mutual telephone company? How big an area did it serve? Was it taken over? If so, when? The coming of radio and television could be mentioned. Finally, the impact of the local newspaper, and larger papers if people subscribed to them, should not be ignored. Their political and social impact, as well as their growth and demise should be studied.

## 7. Social and cultural activities

In early communities many social activities were started or sponsored by church groups, service clubs, fraternal organizations or women's auxiliaries and this chapter should contain a history of these groups. You could determine what the residents did with their leisure time; life was not all hard work! Contrast these activities with the present ones. Some pioneers still living may be able to give accounts of horse racing or fall fairs. The fall fair was often a great occasion in the community as it brought the inhabitants together, as few other events did. Did the community have a baseball, soccer or hockey team?

Was the community known for handicrafts: weaving, pottery, carving? Were theatre and choral groups active? If so, what kind of plays, songs or other entertainment did they present? There may be some families who have old programmes of these events in their possession; these could be reproduced. If there is a library in the area, when, where and by whom was it established?

Holidays such as Dominion Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's were also great occasions. How were they celebrated? Here you might look at folklore, some of it brought from other lands; this could include local sayings and superstitions, stories of haunted houses and tales of some of the unique names given to particular locations. In some communities certain ethno-cultural groups are prominent. You should mention their customs, folklore, costumes and their special contribution to the life of the community.

## 8. The churches in the community

Churches of all denominations occupied a very special place in a pioneer community. Not only were they places of worship but were also centres for social activities and meeting places for the area. The church also had, in many instances, a unifying influence in the region. In researching

the church history of the community you should find out whether there was any early missionary activity there. What groups conducted these missions? How effective were they? If there was no early missionary activity, when was the first church built? One of the first buildings erected in many a pioneer community was the church, and people of all beliefs often attended.

Are there any unique churches in your area? Churches with historic associations? Have any furnishings, such as pulpits, organs, windows been given by prominent donors? What memorial tablets, if any, are found there? Did any church in your area have an outstanding choir?

Then there are the clergy who ministered to the settlers in the area. Some were probably outstanding; others were colourful. Who were they? What denominations came in first? What contribution did the clergy make to the community as a whole? Were there any travelling clergy who worked throughout the area holding services at isolated settlers' homes or perhaps in the local school? All these aspects lend colour and authenticity to the story.

9. Educational development

Many a community, urban or rural, had at one time its first one-room school. When and where was the first one erected. Did the community start out as a school district? Who were the first teachers? What subjects were taught? Who were some of the first students? You should also find out about the operation of these early schools, the school boards, the financing of teachers' salaries and buildings and equipment. When were the schools incorporated into the larger units? Were there any church schools? Research into the history of schools often brings to light many interesting and entertaining incidents and these should not be overlooked. Like the church, the school was a social gathering place in many communities.

You might find out how many students from the community pursued further education. How many went on to larger systems outside the community? How many went on to university? What are they doing now? Did any return to the community?

10. Hospital and medical services

Who was the first doctor to serve the community? You might describe this person's activities and the problems faced, the long rounds in almost all weather conditions. Was there access to more sophisticated medical facilities? Was there a need for them? Were there any epidemics that affected the area, such as the influenza epidemic of 1918? Was there a hospital in the community? If so, when was it founded and who were some of the leading figures in its development? Was it operated by a religious order?

Who was the first dentist? You might describe the methods and efforts to promote good habits in dental care.

11. Special periods and events

Throughout the history of a community there are many special periods and events. There were the two World Wars which affected every Canadian. How many people joined up? In what service did they enlist? Some may have been decorated. Who were they? How many returned? How many memorial hospitals, swimming pools, curling rinks were erected? If there is a branch of the Canadian Legion in your area, some of its members may be able to supply details of wartime activities of those who enlisted. However, avoid the temptation to record straight war stories; these do not belong in a community history unless some member was involved in a unique way. Find out too, how the wars affected the community at home.

The years of the great depression, the "Dirty Thirties", could be touched upon in other chapters but if this period had a marked effect on the community you may want to treat it as a special chapter. Perhaps the demise of a community

or town was directly related to the depression. Did many people leave? Why? Where did they go? On the other hand, your community may have suffered no setback at all and you could determine the reasons for this.

Then there are the occasions for celebrations: The Alberta Golden Jubilee of 1955 and the 75th Anniversary celebrations; Canada's Centennial of 1967; the Mounted Police Centenary of 1973. You could recall any special festivities and projects that took place to mark any of these occasions. How did the community celebrate? Did any prominent individuals come to dedicate monuments or open centennial libraries, etc.?

12. Conclusion

You might entitle this chapter "The town (or community) today", "Prospects for the future", or simply "Epilogue". In this you may wish to describe how the town is developing and try your hand at predicting the future. This final chapter is also an excellent place to describe the spirit of the town. Certain communities are noted for co-operation, a record of cultural or social achievement or for a religious emphasis.

This foregoing outline then merely offers a guide to a thorough coverage of the community's history. Of course, there may well be certain local aspects which are peculiar to your town and which were not mentioned. Your particular history should cover the points that influenced the area's development. Try to be objective; make sure your statements are accurate and your information thoroughly researched and verified. Finally, do not forget humour. There were many light moments.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

As soon as you have become familiar with the general history of Alberta you should start gathering information about your specific area. For this you will need to consult published material such as newspapers, books, magazines, etc., and unpublished material: diaries, letters, government and church records.

### Newspapers

The local newspapers are one of the greatest sources for local history material - though the prudent researcher will always take steps to verify reports and statements from other independent sources. They portray almost every phase of life: social happenings, births, weddings, deaths, political information, weather, crops, the economy, advertising, stagecoach and railway arrivals and departures. Advertisements may reveal names of businesses operating in the area at a particular period as well as prices and sometimes business practices of that time. The annals of societies that flourished and died often appear in newspaper accounts. Theatre and church schedules usually are featured. The rise and decline of sporting teams is often a major item in the local newspaper pages. Enlistments, discharges and the return of men during wartime is to be found here and this supplements information from veterans' organizations.

Be on the lookout for special editions of local newspapers. The fiftieth anniversary of the town's incorporation may have brought out a special edition featuring stories of bygone days. The Alberta Golden Jubilee in 1955 saw special editions of the majority of newspapers in the province and these contained much valuable information.

Newspapers from surrounding communities often provide information about your area. You may find articles that describe your locality as outsiders saw it. Did the local

newspaper consistently support the actions of a particular political party? If there is an apparent political bias, you will gain an insight into, and make allowances for, the partisan nature of the published statements. The local newspaper office, museum or community library may have early issues on file. The Legislature Library in Edmonton has an extensive collection of Alberta weeklies, some of which have been microfilmed. The microfilm copies may be available on inter-library loan through your local public library by contacting the Legislature Library, 216 Legislature Building, Edmonton, T5K 2B6. Further microfilm copies of daily and weekly newspapers may also be available for on-site research at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton or the Glenbow-Alberta Institute in Calgary.

Other published material

This includes magazines, books (which may mention the area in passing)*, and directories as well as maps. The Provincial Archives has copies of some issues of the Alberta Labour News, Farm and Ranch Review, the Nor'West Farmer and the Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal. You will have to spend time reading individual issues to see if there are any articles pertaining to your community. The agricultural journals published practical articles on farming and ranching methods; some of these were submitted by western farmers. Morever, in addition to printing results of agricultural competitions and crop reports, they provided stories about the home, community and personal lives of the subscribers. Alberta History (published quarterly by the Historical Society of Alberta) contains a great variety of historical articles and may be found in most libraries. Telephone directories

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* For list of recommended reading, see bibliography on pages 32 to 34.

and city directories are useful sources of information; they may show not only who lived in the community and when, but also -- in the case of city directories -- the occupations of individuals. Some of the older directories cover the entire province.

The Provincial Archives also has Eaton's catalogues on microfilm from the 1880s to the 1950s. They give an idea of prevailing clothing styles and costs.

Maps are an important and valuable adjunct to research. Old maps frequently show trails, roads and railways no longer there. Or some may show the amount of land taken up by homesteaders. Comparisons of these with more recent maps showing land use as well as topography may frequently provide a clue to the development of a given district. The Provincial Archives has an extensive collection of maps, some dating from the fur trade era, and perusal of some may add a fascinating chapter to your history. There is also a series of early township plans showing the topography, as well as notes on vegetation, soils, etc.

The Provincial Archives has the Alberta Gazette, an extremely useful official publication. It often gives notices of establishment of school districts and villages, the consolidation of school divisions or formation of municipal districts and counties. Although it is not very well indexed, particularly in the early years, it is nonetheless a valuable source.

Unpublished material

Unpublished material includes diaries, letters, personal and family papers, scrapbooks, provincial and local government records, church records, etc.

These constitute excellent research material. Diaries may reveal social events, political activities, illnesses, visitors and day-to-day life. Letters reveal the personalities of both writer and recipient and furnish family information, hopes, disappointments, and

social life. Private papers disclose interests and habits and may reveal various specialized fields of activity. Old family bibles are often inscribed with information on marriages, births, and deaths. For more information you should examine old scrapbooks kept by some residents. Family photograph albums and artifacts are useful in inspiring conversations about the picture or item and its associations. Photographs often depict material of social interest: the pump, the democrat, the first Model T, side whiskers, the hair styles and clothing worn by members of the family. Residents themselves can often add local colour and detail to the history. Recollections, as has been previously indicated, must be handled with extreme care and must be well authenticated. Pioneers might pinpoint exact locations and describe the features of demolished buildings like the first mill, church, dairy or school. If the first doctor, teacher or town clerk is still around you will find conversations with them most helpful. Or you might interview their descendants and tape record their recollections.

Right at the beginning of your project you should inform the Provincial Archives who will then send you free of charge a checklist indicating published and unpublished sources relating to your area available in Edmonton in our various collections, including provincial, local government and private records, photographic, oral history, map and church archives.

## Official records

Official records are those generated by official bodies: the provincial and civic governments, county and municipal district councils and school boards. Not all of these types of records have been transferred to archives, so it might be advisable to first check the local government office nearest you. Larger centres such as Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer and Wetaskiwin have archives which retain the official record of the respective communities. Local government records can include minutes, correspondence, financial records including

tax and assessment rolls, etc. These would provide names of officials, and information on boundary issues, provision of utilities and social services plus the many problems that were faced.

Information on early teachers, enrolments, buildings, number of grades and subjects taught, appear in school records. Building locations, early construction and later improvements to schools may be taken from these as well. Yearbooks and class society minutes record activities and give biographical information.

Hospital records contain the names of doctors, nurses, board members as well as information about the size of the facility, its construction, operation and maintenance expenses. Often material on births, deaths, and the prevalence of certain diseases at various times may be found. You may, however, not be able to obtain too much of this information because most material on patients is considered confidential and is treated as such.

Many of the foregoing sources may be found in the community itself but eventually you will have to widen your search and get in touch with outside sources. The local official records may not be available in the community offices simply because they have been destroyed. Former officials might have the records in their possession or they may be able to tell you where they have been placed. Once you have covered all local sources you should examine those in the Provincial Archives and here you will find not only certain local records but records of the Provincial Government as well.

Among significant local records are many Municipal District and County records that include assessment and tax rolls, county maps, copies of legislation that affected the area, minutes from council meetings, correspondence files and school district records which occasionally include class registers. Records of some rural Mutual Telephone Companies containing articles of association , minutes, annual reports, company

correspondence and accounts as well as advertising literature may be found in the Provincial Archives.

Alberta provincial government records of historical significance are systematically transferred to the Provincial Archives in Edmonton. These consist of the annual reports of different departments as well as correspondence and special reports, including those of Royal Commissions; some of these may well pertain to your community. Microfilms of homestead files prior to 1930 are listed according to District Agencies. Allied with these are the township registers of former Dominion Land Offices listing the applicants's name and location of land; these are by township and range. Like the homestead files, the township registers go up to 1930 at which time the Federal Government transferred jurisdiction of lands and natural resources to the Province. For homestead grants after 1930 it may be necessary to contact the Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife.

Inquest, criminal and civil case files from the Attorney General's Department along with certain lien notes and chattel mortgages from judicial districts throughout Alberta are available for research at the Provincial Archives. Please note, there are some restrictions on use of inquest files.

Election returns by constituencies and individual polls, statements of costs, votes, writs, ballots and plebiscite returns covering the period of 1905-1963 are contained in files from the Executive Council. A complete set of voters' lists does not exist prior to 1980. Petitions by residents for hospitals, council resolutions, correspondence and maps are available from 22 localities, mainly in southern Alberta from 1918-1920. Working files from the former Department of Highways have material regarding road improvements, petitions for the work, investigations, appropriation expenditure statements, progress reports and pay sheets. Surveyors' notebooks with regional topographical descriptions are another important source which are available at the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

The Provincial Archives also has files from the Department of Municipal Affairs. Among these are petitions from local residents requesting the establishment of a village or a change of status from a village to a town. There is also material pertaining to former as well as present municipal districts and counties.

If you have further questions about government records contact the Provincial Archives. It is usually best to write a letter with specific questions and follow up with a phone call and personal visit. There is always a reference archivist on duty to assist you.

Church records

Well kept church records are helpful in appraising religious, social, moral and educational aspects of life, especially in areas without government agencies. In many instances where a mission existed before settlement, the earliest vital statistics may be found in baptismal, marriage, and burial records.

Materials from the Anglican Dioceses of Athabasca, Edmonton and Mackenzie River include registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, burials and services in the areas concerned. These records also contain useful correspondence which may help you find information on the early years of settlement. The Oblate Archives also have similar information and are available to researchers at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. A knowledge of French is essential in studying these and written permission from the Oblate Archivist of the Grandin Province in St. Albert for the use of birth, marriage and burial records of the Oblate Missionaries is required. Check with the reference archivist at the Provincial Archives for further details.

The records of the Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada include many communities. Found in this group are pre-1925 congregations which later joined to form the United Church such as Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Birth, marriage and burial registers may be found in this

collection. The former Western Canada Synod, Lutheran Church in America has deposited its records with the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and its successor, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada will be continuing to deposit. Ask for Information Leaflet no. 12 which describes the church records in the Provincial Archives.

Business records

Local firms can produce invaluable material on personnel, prices, fashions and commodities, types of credit and deliveries as well as information on methods of accounting, production and advertising. Farmers' diaries and country store accounts as well as minutes of local farmers' organizations illustrate changing agricultural conditions and the influence of depression and prosperity.

Railroad, mining, logging and other companies may have papers of value to the local historian. The Provincial Archives has records of some railway unions as well as of the Northern Alberta Railway. (Records of the Canadian National Railway are at the Public Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, K1A 0N3. The C.P.R. Archives in Montreal are now closed. It is possible that their records may be sent to the Public Archives of Canada in the future.) Most corporate archives are kept within the corporations themselves, so it may be necessary to contact them directly.

The foregoing is only a small portion of the research material available. To obtain a better idea of the information for your area, please contact the Provincial Archives of Alberta, 12845 - 102 Avenue, Edmonton, T5N 0M6, or telephone your nearest Provincial Government office and ask to be put through to 427-1750 in Edmonton on the R.I.T.E. system. It is a toll free government system. Other sources of western Canadiana are the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, the Humanities and Social Sciences Library and the University Archives, all of which are situated on the University of Alberta campus.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

You, as the local historian with an intimate knowledge of the area, have both advantages and disadvantages, when it comes to compiling a history. You know the countryside, the people and the general history. You are aware of the persons who have information pertinent to the history. The disadvantages are that local records are often scanty and you will have to look elsewhere for further information than the local informants. You must, however, set aside any pre-conceived opinions, and incorporate them only when they are confirmed by research. You should never assume that any statement is correct without some evidence to back it up. You will be challenged!

It would be good to begin by reading general histories of the west and of the province; a list of these is given in the bibliography at the end of this publication. General material (periodicals, novels, travel literature) that has been written on your particular locality is also useful. This material will furnish some background and enable you to research the history of your specific region more effectively. It puts your community history into a wider perspective. Make a note of all the books you have read. If you wish to include quotations from them in your history, do not forget to obtain permission from the publisher or author and provide an acknowledgement in the final publication. It is also helpful, to properly cite in footnotes and a bibliography, the sources you use. Say exactly from what collection or book the information came. If someone wants to find out more about the sources used, more information is needed than "it came from the Provincial Archives." The Provincial Archives has an information sheet on how to properly describe the information used.

When you start examining specific research material, record the source and file the information according to the subject (or idea). In this way it will be easier to arrange the material when you start writing. In your note taking, use 4 x 6 index cards or 5 x 8 cards; cards are flexible to handle and to

arrange, and the material can be put in logical order when you commence writing.

In addition to printed sources, interviews with local citizens may be conducted. Preparatory work should be considered. To obtain background information send a questionnaire in advance, and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to help ensure its return to you. In this way, you should be able to ask the most pertinent questions. When note taking or tape-recording, respect the wishes of the person being interviewed who, if not entirely at ease, might not relate all the information available. You can follow a line of predetermined questions but also allow the informants to tell their own stories. If need be, be prepared to change the line of questioning. Treat the interview as a regular conversation and if further details are needed, ask more questions. The interview should not be too long in a given time period. Sometimes it is better to continue the interview another day.

Listen carefully and prepare a synopsis of the talk in your own words as soon as possible as accurately as possible. Remember that people may have conflicting stories and may require careful study to verify. Be wary of unconfirmed oral information. A very good "how-to" book on this subject is Voices, a guide to oral history Derek Reimer, et al. Victoria, B.C.: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1984.

## ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

Illustrative material -- maps, charts, photographs -- is an attractive and important supplement to a written history and can save many pages of descriptive writing. It should, however, be emphasized that this may be expensive to produce and should, therefore, be chosen with discretion.

Several simple maps are more effective than one containing a confusion of detail, because the latter appears too "busy" and distracting to a reader. The first of the small maps might establish the position of your community in Alberta and its relation to larger centres such as Edmonton and Calgary. The second might indicate the community's position on transportation routes and the third its location as an agricultural centre. A plan of the community can illustrate streets and buildings at various stages of development or as they were planned. You may wish to include old trails, railways, early roads and modern highways -- and a landing strip if one is nearby. You may want to produce a map of the area showing all the homesteads with the names of the original holders on the map. However, unless this is reproduced on a large scale as a "fold out" the detail will be too small to be read clearly. Used with imagination (and a few cartoons) maps can make the history much more interesting and the writer's work much easier.

Charts are an ideal way of providing statistical information such as population growth, agricultural production or industrial output. If done by a good caricaturist, line sketches can add interest and humour.

Photographs, above all, say more than words but they are expensive to publish and should be carefully selected. They must be sharp to reproduce well. There are large photographic collections at the Provincial Archives in Edmonton and at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute in Calgary dating from 1885; the pictures in these were taken with large cameras and are sharp and clear. In looking through these you may find photographs

of the interiors of early stores or other buildings or you may discover views of buildings or streets in your community. Snapshots are often the only record of a particular event. Group pictures should be properly captioned describing the group and the individuals therein and should be used only if connected with some important event. Well chosen photographs, properly identified, will add a great deal of interest to the history. The source of photographs -- and other illustrative material -- should always be acknowledged.

Homesteaders' shack, [1918] by Harry Pollard. Harry Pollard Collection. Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, image number P. 592.

## TECHNICAL FORMAT

The title page should contain the name of the community and the dates of subject covered by the history. It should also contain the date of publication and the name of the author/editor. Local histories are often dedicated to the pioneers or, if the pioneers are implicitly lauded throughout, the dedication could be to the town itself. There might be a preface, which, if you wish, could be written by a prominent personage in the community, the local M.L.A., for example.* Acknowledgements for assistance should be recognized in a separate note. The table of contents, outlining the general plan of the work, should be included. An index is a valuable aid to help readers locate places, people, and subject areas. Indexing is hard work and is time consuming but your readers will thank you for it. A short but very useful book on indexing is Indexing Your Book by Sina Spiker, obtainable from the University of Wisconsin Press, 114 N. Murray St., Madison Wisconsin, USA 53715, for $3.95 (U.S.). It covers the subject step by step in a clear concise way, particularly the actual mechanics of indexing. Footnotes are not imperative if much of the written text indicates the sources but a list of sources or a bibliography should be included as an appendix. A guide to technicalities such as footnoting and bibliography preparation as well as other valuable information is readily available at local libraries or book stores.

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* Some local histories have a foreword by the Lieutenant Governor or the Premier of the Province. This is highly desirable but you should write well in advance to either of these to make them aware of your intentions. When the book is published you should present them with a complimentary copy.

Stony Plain station, [1920] by Ernest Brown. Ernest Brown Collection. Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, image number B. 7085.

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Recommended are:

i. Blakey, Dorothy and Cooke, A.C.

The Preparation of term essays. Vancouver, 1969. 32 pp. (Sections 4 & 5 deal with footnotes and bibliographies)

ii. Turabian, Kate

Manual for writers of term papers, theses and dissertations. 4th ed. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973.

iii. Felt, Thomas E.

Researching, writing and publishing local history. Nashville, Tenn., American Assoc. for State and Local History, 1976. $6.00 U.S. paperback from the Assoc.

iv. Another good source, available free of charge is the Provincial Archives 4 page handout, Archival citations.

## PUBLICATION

The final cost will depend on the size of the book, the type of binding, the number of copies printed, the number of illustrations it contains, the amount of art work which the printer will have to provide and the amount of money available. You might examine several other local history books, choose the one you like best, and take this example to the printer to discuss the possibilities of a similar publication. Contact several printers to compare prices and services offered and then pick the one that will satisfy your needs. After receiving the estimates, determine the selling price of the book and consider whether or not the price will restrict its popularity. If it appears so, you may have to choose a cheaper printing method or find a way of financing in addition to book sales. The cost of printing will decrease as the number of books increases; the more you can sell, the less you will have to pay, so obtaining advance orders is very desirable. Determine the extent of your market and publish accordingly.

Effective promotion will increase the book's sale, so advertise its availability as much as possible in the local press, radio and T.V. You can send circulars to every resident and as many former residents as you can locate, describing the book. Give the price* and attach an order form. Get stores and gift shops in the area to display and sell the book. You may have to give them a percentage of the cost for handling, so iron out the details in advance. Details of the book should be sent to Alberta libraries and major archives repositories and to the Historical Society of Alberta. Your sales committee will have to work just as hard as the people involved in the compilation of the book to make the history a complete success.

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* This should reflect not only the production costs but also costs of promotion and distribution.

And a word of warning: it is nice to give out complimentary copies but remember that if you do this, the costs have to be borne somewhere and you have lost that much profit. Generally, if some prominent individual has written a foreword you will have to present this person with one; you will also have to give the National Library in Ottawa two copies (at your expense) and you may want to give out a few more for reviews. Another complimentary copy to the Alberta Historical Resources Library is highly recommended. It has the most complete collection of Alberta local histories, and for the sake of posterity it would be good to present a copy of your work to this library at 12845 - 102 Avenue, Edmonton, T5N 0M6. Other than these, the rule is to keep complimentary copies to a minimum.

Local histories rarely turn a profit, so concentrate on trying to recover the costs of production, promotion and distribution. Local philanthropists and town councils might be willing to meet a deficit. For information about possible publication assistance you should contact the Alberta Historical Recources Foundation, 102 - 8 Avenue S.E., Calgary. Financing methods should be investigated thoroughly before the history project is started.

C. E. Thomas home near Lloydminster, August 1920 by Harry Pollard. Harry Pollard Collection. Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, image number P. 594.

## PRINTING METHODS

The following information will provide some guidelines concerning the different printing methods available.

Mimeographing if done by a careful, painstaking typist may be attractive and readable. For best results, use only one side of the paper, leaving plenty of room for a left-side margin. To reduce costs, you can use both sides of a heavier quality paper but space must be left for a margin so that the book may be easily bound. Illustrations, other than simple maps, charts and line drawings, cannot be reproduced by mimeographing. It is the least expensive method but not the most desirable for producing a book of any great permanence.

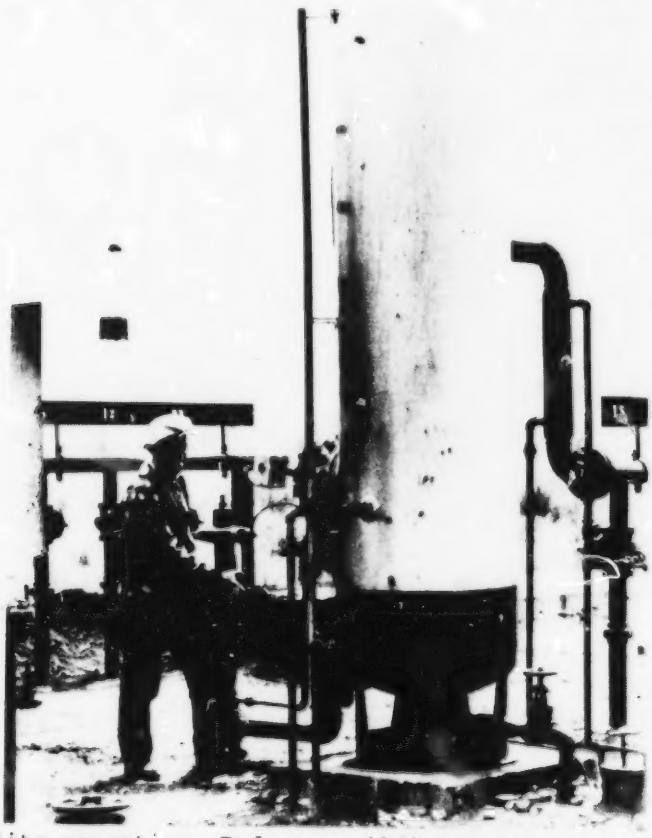
Multilithing uses photographic plates to print script and illustrative material. A perfect master copy is imperative in this process because whatever appears on the copy will also appear in print. A combination of mimeographing and multilithing is another method of getting your manuscript printed. You could mimeograph the text and put the lithographed photographs in the appropriate place.

Printing is of course the most finished and satisfying method. Local newspapers might be able to do the work but a common drawback to this is that the type face used by newspapers is often poor and may give a shoddy impression. You may have to contact other printers who have the equipment to undertake a publication of this type. It is also prudent to contact other organizations who have previously published their histories, to inquire about their experiences.

A word of warning. Before you send any material to anyone, be sure to keep a copy of the text and illustrations for your own reference and protection.

## AND IN CONCLUSION

Your community history, if it is to be well done, will involve much time and effort. Sources are often scattered so you must be prepared to travel -- sometimes at considerable expense -- and to shop around to obtain all the relevant details. You must be prepared to spend long hours sifting through material, interviewing, verifying, writing and revising, to say nothing of correcting proofs and selecting pertinent illustrative material. There will be long sessions on promotion and finance as well as frequent consultations with the printer. You must be prepared for frustrations. There are no short cuts but if you have the patience, tact, and persistence, the end will be well worth the journey. For the result will be a work that will not only give you immense satisfaction, but one that will remain an enduring tribute to your community and to those who strove for its emergence and growth.



Royalite operation, Redwater oilfield, [1947] by Harry Pollard. Harry Pollard Collection. Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, image number P. 2640.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is a selected list of references which give useful background information concerning the history of Alberta and more technical information on historical endeavours. These should be useful to those writing local histories.


Alberta Government and University of Alberta — Atlas of Alberta. Edmonton, 1969. This publication gives a wealth of useful information in its maps and charts which depict geology, topography, climate, wildlife, population trends, land use, and much more.

Allen, Barbara — From memory to history: using oral sources in local historical research. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Blue, John — Alberta Past and Present. Historical and Biographical. Chicago, 1924. 3 vols. Although written sixty years ago, it has useful information. Volumes 2 and 3 contain useful biographical information.

Cassidy, Maureen — Local history in British Columbia: a guide to researching, writing and publishing for the non-professional. [Victoria]: British Columbia Heritage Trust, 1983.

Dempsey, Hugh Alymer — How to prepare a local history. (Glenbow Archives Series No. 2) Calgary: Glenbow Alberta Institute, 1968.

Dempsey, Hugh Alymer — Indian tribes of Alberta. Calgary, 1978.

Hardy, W.G. (editor) — Alberta. A Natural History. Edmonton, 1967. The chapters in this book are written by different authors and furnish useful information on geology, climate, flora, fauna, native people, etc. It is written in an easy style and is well illustrated.

Holmgren, E.J., and P.M. — Over 2,000 Place Names of Alberta. 3rd ed. Saskatoon, 1976. Gives derivation of names of some of geographical features in Alberta: Mountains, rivers, lakes, towns, villages, cities, etc.

Jenness, Diamond — The Indians of Canada. 7th edition. Ottawa, 1977. This work, first published in 1932 is still valuable for its comprehensive summary of the native peoples and their way of life.

MacGregor, James G. — A History of Alberta. Edmonton 1977. An up to date account on the subject. The narrative is brought up to the present.

MacRae, A.O. — History of the Province of Alberta. Calgary, 1912. 2 vols. Chiefly valuable for its biographical information in a similar manner to Blue.

Morton, Arthur S. — A History of the Canadian West to 1870. 2nd edition edited by L.G. Thomas. Toronto, 1973. This work, originally published in 1939, covers the Canadian west throughout the exploration and fur trade era. It is extremely thorough in its coverage and is still considered the best work on the subject.

Oral history: basic techniques — Co-ordinated and edited by Jane McCraken, et al. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Museum of Man and Nature, 1974.

Peel, Bruce Braden — A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953, with biographical index. 2nd ed. Toronto, 1973.

Ridge, Alan D. (editor) — Alberta Archives 1984 - Preserving our documentary heritage. Edmonton 1984.

Strathearn, Gloria M. — Alberta, 1954-1979: a provincial bibliography. Edmonton: University of Alberta Department of Printing Services, 1982.

Voices, a guide to oral history — Derek Reimer, et al. Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1984.

Wormington, Hannah Marie and Forbis, Richard G. — An introduction to the archaeology of Alberta, Canada. Denver, 1965.

The following are selected periodicals with useful information which may be found in any extensive library.

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| Alberta History | Published quarterly by the Historical Society of Alberta, Box 4035, Station C, Calgary, T2T 5M9. This journal contains many interesting and valuable original articles on Alberta history in all its varied aspects. |
| The Beaver | Published quarterly by the Hudson's Bay Company. Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Features mostly the fur trade but many of its articles deal with what is now Alberta. The articles are of a high standard and very readable. |
| Canadian Historical Review | Published quarterly for the Canadian Historical Association. This publication covers all of Canada but there are many fine articles on the west. Articles are written in a very scholarly style. |
| Canadian Geographic Journal | Ottawa. This well known periodical has many useful articles on various geographical aspects of the western prairies, including Alberta. |